

Social Work Ambassador

Laura Keronhan, BHSCT



Laura is currently employed as a social worker in Mount Oriel, Physical Health and Disability team in the Belfast Health and Social Care Trust (BHSCT). She has worked there since May 2014. Laura works in partnership with service users aged 18-65 years who have a physical disability and live within the South and East Belfast area. She

assesses their needs using the Northern Ireland Single Assessment Tool (NISAT) and implements care plans to meet these needs. She also completes regular reviews to ensure assessments are up to date. In addition to working with service users she works with their families and carers to provide support and information.

“There is something very rewarding on a personal level about supporting a person to get to where they want or need to be in life.”

Have you always worked in social work?

I was still at school when I decided I wanted to be a social worker and was lucky enough to get on to the Degree in Social Work straight from school. I had helped support my mum who has her own health issues, worked as a care assistant from the age of 16 years and volunteered with a range of community organisations. All of which had motivated me to want to work with people as I had found a sense of achievement in helping people attain a better quality of life.

As a volunteer I had worked with MENCAP, my local gateway club and the St John Ambulance Youth - which provided me with experience of working with younger children and teenagers. I feel these caring and work experiences formed the basis of my interest in social work and after doing some of my own research, including talking to four practising qualified social workers - I decided it was the career for me!

Training to be a Social Worker

I completed the three year Degree in Social Work (the Degree) at Queens University Belfast, graduating in July 2013.

The Degree consisted of a combination of academic study and more practical learning during two social work placements. The academic study focused on a variety of topics, including; law, sociology, social policy, children’s services, adult services, criminal justice and preparation for practice.

My first placement was in a family support and intervention team which lasted for four months; whilst my second placement was in a community mental health team for older people. I thoroughly enjoyed both these experiences and found they really enhanced my learning and helped me gain both insight and experience into what being a social worker actually entailed.

During my degree I also had to complete flexible learning days. These were independent study days where I was required to identify my own learning needs and develop a plan to meet them. You would identify a learning need and try to meet that need through attending a training course on that subject or visiting an organisation that would be able to provide you with support and information. These were very useful days as they encouraged me to reflect on my own learning needs.

Professional development

When I first qualified as a social worker in 2013, I had to complete an Assessed Year in Employment (AYE) to evidence that I was practising effectively as a social worker. This involved me providing evidence of work I had completed to meet the six key roles of social work and recording it in supervision with my manager.

Supervision was more frequent during my first year of employment to ensure I had all the support and guidance to work safely and effectively with service users. In addition I attended the trust AYE forum once per month which was great as you could seek support from other newly qualified social workers, who were going through similar things.

Since completing my AYE I have completed the Initial Professional Development (IPD) programme which is part of Professional in Practice (the post qualifying framework). The programme was undertaken at Ulster University and has been a good way to develop my practice.

What challenges do you face in your job?

One of the major challenges in social work at present are the budget restraints which ultimately impact on the services you can deliver to service users.

Caseloads are also high at present due to demands on services - so you constantly have to prioritise your workload. This can be challenging when several things are urgent. Balancing time spent with service users with that of completing recording can also be another challenge.

In what way is the social work profession rewarding?

I really enjoy working with service users and their families and helping to facilitate positive change in their lives. There is also something very rewarding on a personal level about supporting a person to get to where they want or need to be in life.

How do you see your career progressing?

I would like to complete the practice teaching course to enable me to support student social workers on their journey to becoming a qualified social worker. I would also be interested in completing the adult safeguarding programme in the near future.

What does it mean to work in a regulated profession and be registered with NISCC?

It is great working in a regulated profession as it clearly sets out what is expected of you both by your employer and more widely as a social worker in Northern Ireland through registration with NISCC.

Why did you choose to become a Social Work Ambassador and what do you hope to gain from this role?

I am extremely passionate about social work and social work development in Northern Ireland. I wish to help share that passion with those considering a career in social work, student social workers or those looking more information on physical health and disability social work practice.